

This week Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta indicated that Iran could be capable of producing a nuclear weapon in 2012 and developing the technology to deliver a weapon in “another one to two years (after that).” Secretary Panetta noted that Iran may yet choose a more peaceful course, but his warning makes it clear that the opportunity to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran is quickly slipping away. Meanwhile, U.S. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper indicated today that Iran is increasingly willing to unleash terrorist attacks on American soil, a concern that grew stronger after U.S. law enforcement disrupted an Iranian plot to [assassinate](#) the Saudi Arabia Ambassador to the United States last year.

As I [have expressed numerous times](#) , Iran’s nuclear weapons program represents an extremely serious threat to our national security and our allies in the Middle East. Iran is ruled by a radical Shiite ayatollah and its president has called for the destruction of Israel. The country’s elite forces are responsible for killing U.S. troops who served in Iraq, and Iran continues to meddle into Iraq’s affairs. Iran is also a major sponsor of the terrorist groups Hezbollah and Hamas, a primary supporter of the brutal regime in Syria, and one of the worst [human rights violators](#)

. Further, Iran recently threatened to shut off access to Strait of Hormuz, which would be viewed as an act of war by the United States and other countries that utilize the Persian Gulf for economic or defense purposes.

I believe the international community must speak with one voice to effectively prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. U.S. and international sanctions remain an important part of such action. I’m encouraged that the [sanctions](#) passed by Congress in 2010 have substantially reduced foreign investment into Iran’s economy, undermining their nuclear program. Yet, the existing sanctions have not stopped Iran’s ambitions, so Congress recently imposed additional sanctions on financial institutions—including Iran’s central bank—that do business in or with Iran. Meanwhile, the European Union recently announced that they will ban imports of Iranian oil starting in July. I hope that these collective actions continue to slow Iran’s nuclear program.

Beyond sanctions, I urge the Obama Administration to explicitly and repeatedly condemn Iran’s hostile activities and to keep this major challenge on the front burner of the international community. The Administration should also provide all appropriate assistance to the democratic movement in Iran. Because Iran’s nuclear program severely threatens our national security, I also continue to believe the United States should keep all options on the table to prevent Iran from producing a nuclear weapon.